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STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
PERSONNEL RECOVERY SYSTEM

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Congress and the Department of Defense have recently taken unprecedented steps to establish a Department of Defense-wide personnel recovery capability. This is in response to the high steady-state demands of military operations today and the historic difficulty the Services have experienced in developing and sustaining combat rescue capabilities in peacetime. This study examines the strategic implications of these policy initiatives by looking at what the personnel recovery system is and why it is needed, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. The study examines the role that national leadership and oversight has played thus far in providing lasting solutions to the chronic deficiencies of combat rescue, a problem which the Services alone have not solved. The study argues that, while Congress and the Defense Department have created a sound framework for lasting change, key challenges remain. The personnel recovery system presently exists only in concept and must now be implemented to become a reality. And to achieve its full potential, the concept must be expanded beyond the Department of Defense and integrated into the interagency process and National Security Council.

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I. Introduction.

Over the past 50 years, our nation's ability to recover its personnel detained or isolated in hostile territory has been chronically deficient. Since World War II, combat rescue forces have surged three times after the outbreak of war, then rapidly fallen into disrepair during periods of peace. Defense policy and doctrine have left this matter to the Services, giving them flexibility to meet their own needs. But as we emerge from the Cold War, heavily engaged in peace operations, the Services have neither the forces nor the guidance to meet the continuous and compelling need for personnel recovery today.

Not only is the steady-state demand for combat rescue the highest that it has been since the Vietnam War, with ongoing operations in Kuwait, Northern Iraq, and Bosnia, but recent "peacetime" crises have highlighted a national vulnerability:

The inability to prevent the capture of the crew from Corvette 03 (F-15E) in Western Iraq in 1991, the inability of DOD to locate and recover CW3 Mike Durrant...shot down over Mogadishu in 1993, the requirement for DOD to rely on (the State Department) to recover CW2 Bobby Hall and crew from North Korea, and the difficulty DOD had in locating Capt. Scott O'Grady in Bosnia in 1995 all demonstrate the need for DOD to develop a more effective system to recover isolated personnel... ¹

Americans, engaged in peace operations throughout the world, are often in small numbers, located where U.S. military responses are politically constrained or not possible and the risk of violence is high. Delay or inability to recover U.S. personnel threatens not only the individuals but, considering mass media, can also threaten regional policy by leveraging public opinion against our elected leaders. ² Recently, however, Congress and the Department of Defense have taken unprecedeted steps to improve combat rescue and the entire spectrum of personnel recovery capability.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of these initiatives in correcting the historic and systemic shortfalls of personnel recovery. Focus is placed on national level policy making, and not on force development or operations, since the historic lack of policy has been the most fundamental problem. This study begins by describing what the personnel recovery system is and why it is needed from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Recent Congressional and Defense policy initiatives are then described and evaluated. The study concludes that these initiatives do, in fact, offer real potential to correct the former problems, but that significant challenges remain. Actual implementation of the still nascent personnel recovery system is yet to occur and is dependent upon the creation of a joint field agency to do the requisite field work. Moreover, to realize the full potential of the personnel recovery system, it must be integrated beyond the Department of Defense into the interagency process and National Security Council.

II. The Personnel Recovery System.

The concept of personnel recovery goes beyond that of combat rescue and was officially recognized by the Office of the Secretary of Defense in September 1994.³ It is defined as “the aggregation of military, civil, and political efforts to obtain the release or recovery of captured, missing, or isolated U.S. government personnel and others as designated from the National Command Authorities from uncertain and hostile environments and denied areas.”⁴ Its purpose is to provide the conceptual framework needed to integrate all related resources into a single and highly effective national capability. One way to understand this is to look at the five major tasks of personnel recovery: reporting, locating, supporting, recovering, and repatriating.

These are collectively referred to as the Personnel Recovery Cycle.⁵ Organizations having any part in these tasks are included in the system: the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Services, theater forces, Defense agencies, and Defense support agencies (such as the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency). The system will integrate the personnel recovery-related activities among all these components by establishing Defense policy and joint doctrine, which will then guide subsequent force development and operations.

The task of reporting is the process of crisis notification which now follows prescribed Defense channels and often impedes rapid horizontal flow of time critical information between agencies.⁶ Consider the case of U.S. Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady, who was shot down over Bosnia in 1995 and evaded for over five days in hostile territory before anyone knew he was alive. The State Department, first to learn of his survival through in-country contacts, routed this information up through State channels rather than directly to key Defense agencies, delaying information flow and rescue responsiveness.⁷

The task of rapidly locating an individual depends upon communications and military or national intelligence. Improvements in equipment, integration with surveillance assets, and creation of effective Defense-wide policy are needed. Inadequate electronic surveillance and personal survival radio equipment prevented forces from locating Captain O'Grady for five days in Bosnia.⁸ The search to locate U.S. Army Warrant Officer Michael Durrant after his shoot down and capture in Somalia in 1994 revealed major gaps in locating capability and Defense policy:

Numerous Defense components were working overtime to locate [him] and his crew, but there was minimal coordination and much duplication

between organizations. Eventually Lt Gen Ryan, Assistant to the Chairman [JCS], assumed the task of coordinating the supporting activities of OSD, NSA, DIA, the Services, and the unified commands. All of the arrangements were ad hoc and mostly out of channels.⁹

The supporting task focuses on assistance to isolated or captured personnel and their families.¹⁰ Support takes many forms, including training and equipping of combatants in advance for survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE). The Joint Service SERE Agency provides this training and other real-time support to the Services and isolated personnel. The importance of Service policy is illustrated by the case of U.S. Army Warrant Officers Bobby Hall who, after inadvertently flying into North Korea, was shot down and captured as a prisoner of war. Because Army policy does not require SERE training for most of its pilots, Hall was ill-prepared to deal with his captivity. Lack of SERE knowledge threatened both his safety and emotional ability to cope.¹¹ Conversely, Air Force policy, which requires SERE training for all pilots, had prepared Captain O'Grady to successfully evade enemy capture in Bosnia and survive on the land for five days until his rescue.¹²

The recovery task involves rapidly selecting the proper method to obtain the individual, and generally requires military, civilian, or diplomatic action. Combat search and rescue fits in here. But recovery includes many other methods such as the U.S. Marine TRAP concept (tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel),¹³ escape and recovery, direct action, peacetime and theater search and rescue, and diplomatic intervention. Whereas search and rescue methods can be performed by civilian or military organizations almost anywhere except hostile settings, combat rescue is conducted solely by military combat forces which, ideally, are specially equipped and

trained for that purpose.¹⁴ Direct action methods involve specialized offensive actions to forcibly free individuals from their captors, such as the attempted Iranian hostage rescue in 1980.

Diplomatic methods highlight the broad scope of personnel recovery. In operations other than war, “where U.S. military goals and actions are limited, and are not designed or intended to compel an adversary to comply with U.S. government terms and conditions,”¹⁵ reliance on military means for recovery may be undesirable or impossible. With this in mind, it was State Department diplomatic negotiations, not military action, that secured the releases of U.S. Army Warrant Officers Mike Durrant from Somalia in 1994 and Bobby Hall from North Korea in 1995.¹⁶

The fifth major task, repatriation, encompasses logistics and administrative tasks needed to ‘bring em home,’ including transportation, interagency coordination, debriefings, and medical support.¹⁷ Had personnel recovery doctrine existed in 1995, the repatriation of Bobby Hall from North Korea would have been conducted much more efficiently.¹⁸

III. Historical Perspective.

The Defense Department’s recent focus on personnel recovery is due in part to the inability of the Services to sustain ample combat rescue capability over the past 50 years, particularly during peacetime. Driven by post-war draw downs and the higher priority of other responsibilities, the Service’s have repeatedly put combat rescue on the back burner.¹⁹ Unlike specifically assigned military functions, combat rescue evolved not from the orderly flow of a compelling national need, followed by the development of Defense policy, then joint doctrine, and finally Service capability,

but through a process quite the reverse. The tactical need for each Service to recover its personnel during combat gave rise to the creation of combat recovery techniques unique to its own forces, which usually dissipated after each conflict. What doctrine did evolve tended to support this Service-based arrangement and Defense policy has remained largely ill-defined to this day.

Historically, the need for combat rescue grew from four timeless imperatives: First, Americans share a strong cultural belief in the importance of human life. Second, experienced combat aircrews are a valuable and limited resource--expensive to train and difficult to quickly replace, especially in wartime. Third, knowing that every effort will be made to rescue them increases the morale of combat forces.²¹ Finally, the combat rescue of military personnel denies our enemies a valuable source of military intelligence and leverage against our government.²²

The roots of combat rescue can be traced to the air-sea rescue efforts of early World War II. Responding to the loss of combat aircrews over the North Sea, the U.S. began developing what eventually became a credible air-sea rescue force of long-range and amphibious aircraft. By the war's end, nearly 5,000 Army Air Force personnel had been rescued by these forces in both the European and Pacific theaters. Overland rescue, however, was limited to escape and evasion efforts until the first helicopters entered the China-Burma-India theater in May 1945.²⁰

The years between WW-II and Korea saw the first of several combat rescue force reductions, as well as early shaping of Service-based rescue doctrine. A post-war argument between the Army Air Force and the Coast Guard over this issue resulted in the creation of the Air Rescue Service in 1946 to conduct overland rescue

and rescue of overseas air routes. The Coast Guard retained the task of maritime rescue, one which it has held since 1915.²³ But this roles and missions issue was small when viewed in the context of the National Security Act of 1947. This Act not only created the three Service departments, including a new independent Air Force, but also created the unified command structure of our armed forces today.²⁴ To clarify ensuing confusion over Service roles and missions, then Secretary of Defense James Forrestal met with the Service chiefs at Key West in 1948. The resulting Key West Agreement divided Service duties largely along land, sea, and air lines,²⁵ and assigned functions to the Armed Forces, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Services.

Each Service was assigned primary functions—"in which that Service has a clear cut responsibility," collateral functions—"wherein the Service's forces would be employed to support and supplement the other Services in carrying out their primary function," and common functions—which applied equally to all.²⁶ Neither the Key West Agreement, nor the 1951 Joint Action Armed Forces document that implemented Key West, addressed combat rescue or even search and rescue as a function--primary, collateral, or common.^{27, 28} Not until the 1959 United Action Armed Forces document would search and rescue be assigned, and then only as a "special activity" of each Service.²⁹ Consequently, the Services have not been obligated to organize, train, and equip for combat rescue or personnel recovery.

Going into the Korean War the Services had no doctrine, equipment, or training for combat rescue. But with the first widespread use of the helicopter, each Service eventually improvised its own overland combat rescue tactics. The Marines used their organic helicopters for this, which routinely operated in close proximity to

their personnel. The Army operated in a similar fashion but also had helicopters dedicated to battlefield medical evacuation. The Navy based its helicopters on aircraft carriers for general support, which eventually included overland combat rescue. The Air Force focused on rescue of aircrews with longer range multi-engine and amphibious airplanes and the short-range helicopters of the era.³⁰ Despite modern advances, many of these concepts are present and reflected in how each Service conducts rescue today, as detailed in Appendix A. By the end of the war, U.S. Services had flown 221 combat rescues. The Army had conducted 19,946 medical evacuations, and Air Rescue Service, 9,216 evacuations.³¹

Combat rescue force reductions after the Korean War were dramatic. Air Rescue Service reduced from 7,900 personnel and 50 squadrons in 1954 to only 1,600 personnel and 11 squadrons in 1961.³² Post-war rescue consisted of fixed-wing rescue escort of global strategic bombers and specialized helicopter support for arctic and local base rescue as well as the Space program. By 1958, additional force reductions had led to Service guidance that prohibited funding for combat rescue:³³

Air Rescue Service will be organized, manned, equipped, trained, and deployed to support peacetime air operations. No special units or specially designed aircraft will be provided for the sole purpose of wartime search and rescue. Wartime rescue operations will be dictated by the capabilities of equipment used for peacetime search and rescue.³⁴

In 1956, the National Search and Rescue Plan became the first published doctrine for rescue responsibilities and mirrored the Service-oriented traditions.³⁵ The Coast Guard retained responsibility for maritime rescue and the Air Force for inland rescue coordination.³⁶ The Army was assigned responsibility for military

disaster assistance, and the unified commanders were assigned responsibility for regional rescue operations, with the forces provided to them by the Services.³⁷

A parallel development in the evolution of personnel recovery also began in this period when, in 1953, the Air Force Chief of Staff was assigned as the executive agent to implement joint evasion and escape policy. The role of the executive agent had been created by the Key West Agreement as a means to implement joint policy for "special tactics, techniques and equipment."³⁸ Today, the Joint Services SERE Agency is the joint executive agent for evasion and escape and POW/MIA issues, and the Secretary of Defense executive agent for code of conduct and SERE training.³⁹

In 1964, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, combat rescue capabilities were again mustered from scratch.⁴⁰ Total lack of combat rescue doctrine, equipment, training, and experience took a heavy toll, not only on pilots not rescued, but also on the rescue forces themselves. Initially, Air Rescue Service lost one aircraft and had one fatality for every five combat rescue attempts, while the Navy, even less prepared, lost two and a half times that rate.⁴¹ Despite heavy initial losses, Air Force and Navy combat rescue forces grew steadily throughout the war. By the early 1970's, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service consisted of 355 combat aircraft and almost 6,000 personnel⁴² and had logged 3,883 combat saves in Southeast Asia.⁴³

Despite combat rescue's proven worth in Southeast Asia, despite the recurring need for this capability for periodic regional crises such as the Mayaguez affair in May 1975,⁴⁴ and despite the ongoing global Cold War threat, combat rescue forces were cut once more. In 1975, the Navy deactivated one of its two dedicated combat rescue squadrons and transferred the other into the Reserves.⁴⁵ By the early 1980's,

the Air Force, which had built the largest dedicated combat rescue force ever,⁴⁶ gutted its rescue force structure, virtually dissolving its capability: All nine of rescue's new threat penetration and adverse-weather capable HH-53H "Pave Low III" helicopters were transferred to special operations in 1980 after the failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran. In 1985, the remaining 25 combat rescue HH-53B/C helicopters were also transferred to special operations by Congressional direction. Concurrently, budget constraints forced cancellation of the Air Force's combat rescue modernization program—243 state-of-the-art HH-60As, intended to provide a night, adverse-weather-penetration capability similar to that of the Pave Lows.⁴⁷ The 30 smaller combat rescue UH-1Ns were also cut from the force. And by 1988, the Air Force's only combat-ready UH-60A rescue unit and most HC-130 tankers were also transferred from rescue to special operations. Only 80 older CH/HH-3Es remained in combat rescue and 59 of these were in the Reserves.⁴⁸

In 1987, the Air Force decided to modernize its rescue force again, this time for coverage of tactical fighter training over austere ranges—not for combat rescue. The older H-3s were to be replaced at the rate of about ten helicopters per year with new HH-60Gs; a long-range, rescue-configured version of the Army UH-60A "Blackhawk".⁴⁹ Due to the visionary insight and diligence of the company grade staff officers who built and implemented the acquisition strategy, the HH-60s were also very well equipped for combat rescue and were actually brought into the Service at twice that rate. By 1989, when Air Force leaders finally decided to recreate combat rescue, for the fourth time, HH-60 production was already well under way.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this decision came too late to support Desert Storm.⁵¹

The dilemma of Service-oriented combat rescue doctrine became apparent in Desert Storm. Joint doctrine had assigned each Service the rescue responsibility for its own personnel, but had given the unified commanders responsibility for theater rescue, using forces provided by the Services. The problem was that none of the Services had this capability to provide to Central Command. General Norman Schwarzkopf, then Commander in Chief, Central Command, was forced to divert his theater special operations forces from their primary function to perform combat rescue.⁵² The impact of this decision persists even today over Bosnia and Northern Iraq, where joint special operations forces continue to fill the combat rescue void.⁵³

Another doctrinal disconnect evident during Desert Storm was the lack of integration between combat rescue and other personnel recovery forces. This became apparent after Corvette 0-3, an Air Force F-15 crew, was shot down and captured in Iraq. "Neither the crew nor the Joint Rescue Coordination Center were aware of the evasion and escape net that existed in their close proximity."⁵⁴ But since Desert Storm and the end of the Cold War, our national security environment has changed completely and so has the personnel recovery requirement.

IV. Today's Strategic Environment.

In the wake of the Cold War, the U.S. no longer concentrates its resources on the one overriding goal of containing the Communist threat. Our nation has instead assumed a new role; that of the world's leading peacekeeper, with all its attendant risks and responsibilities. We now engage in several regions beyond our borders to promote our national interests, enlarge the community of market democracies, and contain a variety of threats to our nation and our allies.⁵⁵

As a matter of national security, the U.S. has four priorities of interest which dictate the level of our involvement. First, we seek to ensure peace among major powers, stressing good relations and peaceful resolution of disputes. Second, we engage selectively in regional conflicts to honor our commitments or prevent a greater danger later. Third, we respond to transnational threats, such as drug trafficking, terrorism, pollution, and bolstering civil police forces. Fourth, we lend support to failed states, to provide humanitarian disaster relief, prevent genocide, contain border disputes, and help keep the peace between clashing parties.⁵⁶

The U.S. military now conducts its planning based on tasks, since we can no longer guard against a known primary threat. “The best way to plan in a world with unknown enemies is to identify the sorts of tasks that the military will be called upon to do, not to guess about the specifics of where and whom the military will be asked to fight.”⁵⁷ These tasks include humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, peace enforcing, conflict resolution, nation building, and other regional operations that require U.S. personnel to maintain a continuous forward presence in several places across the globe. Under such conditions, the need to be prepared to recover Defense Department personnel in danger becomes compelling and continuous, as evidenced by our ongoing and open-ended combat rescue alert commitments in Kuwait, Bosnia, and Northern Iraq, as well as the broad scope of recent contingency crises.⁵⁸ Events no longer permit us the time to recreate combat rescue capabilities from scratch.

The Department of Defense is also challenged by shrinking budgets and force reductions, while still tasked to prepare for two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts.⁵⁹ We must do more with less at an increasingly high operations tempo,

and not to tie up specially trained combat forces needlessly.⁶⁰ All military activities compete for limited resources and must therefore be highly effective and efficient to succeed. Given the increased need for, and complexity of, personnel recovery against the shrinking Defense budget, it becomes clear that Service-oriented combat rescue doctrine is inadequate. Great gains can and must be realized by integrating all existing national capabilities and by synchronizing their future force improvements.

V. New Policy Initiatives.

Congress and the Secretary of Defense have recently taken important steps to correct these systemic problems. Two over-arching Defense actions are the creation of a policy proponent under the Secretary of Defense for personnel recovery, and the establishment of an executive agent for combat rescue. These policy initiatives provide the foundation for comprehensive and lasting improvements which surpass the individual capability of each Service. Even more significant is the Congressional language in the 1996 Authorization bill, directing the Secretary of Defense to create an Office of Missing Personnel which will manage personnel recovery policy.⁶¹

As to the Defense initiatives, on September 15, 1994, the Secretary of Defense assigned the Assistant Secretary for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD (SO/LIC)) as the principal manager for personnel recovery. This task entailed developing “a comprehensive plan for personnel recovery policy... [including the] deconfliction and integration of existing policies and promulgation of additional policy as well as interdepartmental and interagency coordination of the Department of Defense’s personnel recovery policies and programs.”⁶²

ASD (SO/LIC) formed a personnel recovery working group which conducted “a detailed review of personnel recovery policies, requirements, and capabilities.”⁶³ Their review revealed that personnel recovery-related policy was incomplete and dispersed across 19 non-interrelated directives.⁶⁴ The working group noted that neither combat rescue nor evasion and escape had ever been assigned to the Services as military functions and cited the historic difficulty in procuring common rescue equipment.⁶⁵ In response, ASD (SO/LIC) is now writing a new Defense directive that will incorporate all policy guidance in a single directive.⁶⁶ This will provide the cornerstone on which military departments will, for the first time, be required to “train, equip, and operate in accordance with joint personnel recovery doctrine”.⁶⁷

The Joint Staff’s review of doctrine also revealed deficiencies. The only current doctrine pertaining to personnel recovery was set forth in the Joint Publication (JP) 3-50 series, which was incomplete and did not provide joint force commanders with the “broad principles needed to develop comprehensive personnel recovery concepts and plans in support of the full range of military operations.”⁶⁸ (See Appendix B.) Lack of doctrine has resulted in inadequate interagency coordination, unnecessary delays, and duplications of effort in several recent crises. Three such examples are: the search for Durrant in Somalia, the repatriation of Hall and his deceased crew mate from North Korea, and the combat rescue planning for Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti.⁶⁹ The Joint staff is now rewriting the entire JP 3-50 series to incorporate doctrine for all aspects of personnel recovery.⁷⁰ (See Figure 2.)

The working group also wrote a four-phase Personnel Recovery Development Plan which provides the framework for creating the system. Phase I consists of a

theater assessment study to define requirements, capabilities, and limitations. This will be done with theater planning staffs and will be the first such study to quantify the entire scope of personnel recovery requirements, not merely combat rescue, within each unified commander's region. This study should be completed by December 1996.⁷¹

Phase II will be the creation of the Personnel Recovery Master Plan that will guide the implementation of the system, with specific milestones and time-phased taskings for all involved agencies.⁷² Phase III will implement the Master Plan by integrating personnel recovery requirements and policy into Defense planning and programming guidance. This will include the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System, the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan, Defense Planning Guidance, and the Services' Program Objective Memorandums (POM).⁷³ The goal is to include personnel recovery requirements in the Fiscal Year 1998 POM.⁷⁴ Phase IV will be the de facto implementation of capability and ongoing management of the system. It includes review and fine tuning of policy, requirements, and capabilities, interagency coordination, and other needs. This phase continues indefinitely.⁷⁵

Another key initiative was the creation of the Personnel Recovery Crisis Response Cell. This is a broad-based policy coordination body designed to rapidly provide senior policy makers with situation assessments and recommendations during personnel recovery crises.⁷⁶ Had it existed at the time of Bobby Hall's shoot down in North Korea, it would have greatly helped the Deputy Secretary of Defense in sorting out the complexities of arranging for Hall's release, which was worked with the State Department and its nuclear negotiations team already in country.⁷⁷

Interagency involvement is central to the personnel recovery system but, until recently, formal interagency agreements on the matter were obscure and inadequate. This past January, a new and comprehensive agreement between the Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency was implemented that provides mutual support for planning, training, operations, research and development.⁷⁸ A similar agreement is also under development between the Defense and State departments. Collectively, ASD (SO/LIC)'s personnel recovery policy initiatives are methodical and comprehensive, offering a strong foundation for correcting previous shortfalls.

Another major Defense policy initiative is the creation of an executive agency for combat search and rescue, which originated from a recommendation of the 1995 Commission On Roles and Missions.⁷⁹ The Commission's goal was to improve combat rescue support to the theaters by increasing the availability of dedicated Air Force combat rescue assets and by optimizing interoperability between the Services.⁸⁰ Fundamental concerns were the need to reduce the "steady-state" draw on special operations forces that have been performing combat rescue continuously for the past six years, and to ensure adequate long-range combat rescue coverage for Navy and Marine strike aircraft operating beyond the range of their organic forces.⁸¹ The Commission recommended that, "the Secretary of Defense expand the Air Force's [joint] executive agent responsibilities for evasion and escape to include responsibility for combat rescue."⁸² But, rather than assigning this to the Joint Services SERE Agency, which has been the joint executive agent for evasion and escape since 1953, the Secretary of the Air Force assigned this to Air Combat Command,⁸³ which is the force provider for Air Force combat rescue forces.

The combat search and rescue executive agency charter, recently written by the Joint Staff and Office of the Secretary of Defense, affords Air Combat Command with Defense Department-level influence to improve the interoperability of joint combat rescue.⁸⁴ As executive agent, Air Combat Command should provide expertise and recommendations to the other Services and Defense agencies for joint combat rescue doctrine, procedures, equipment, and training, and assist the implementation of the decisions of the Secretary of Defense. Each Service will, however, continue to manage its own combat search and rescue requirements and force structure.⁸⁵ Because the role of combat search and rescue executive agent is new for Air Combat Command, it now faces many challenges in developing the capability to properly execute this joint responsibility.

The new Department of Defense Directive on personnel recovery will direct Air Combat Command to fully integrate joint combat rescue doctrine, procedures, and capabilities with the larger personnel recovery system.⁸⁶ But the Commission's recommendation to create an executive agent for combat rescue fell short of the broader requirement for implementation of personnel recovery. No component or agency has yet been assigned this task, one which is key to the success of the system.

The final major initiative to be addressed herein is the recent Congressional legislation regarding missing persons. The 1996 Authorization Bill, effective 10 February, amended U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 1501, and states in pertinent part:

- (1) The SECDEF shall establish within the OSD an office to have responsibility for...policy relating to missing persons...[to]...include:
 - (A) policy, control, and oversight within the DOD of the entire process for investigation and recovery related to missing persons (including matters related to search, rescue, escape and evasion)...
- (3) The office shall establish policies which shall apply uniformly

throughout the DOD for personnel recovery (including search, rescue, escape, evasion).⁸⁷

In essence, this law mandates the consolidation of all Department of Defense policy mechanisms, dealing with missing persons and personnel recovery, into one central function within the Office of the Secretary of Defense. At the time of this writing, the most likely arrangement will be to transfer the personnel recovery function of ASD (SO/LIC) to the Defense POW/MIA Office, under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. This consolidated office will be named The Office of Missing Personnel.⁸⁸

VI. Analysis.

Congress' new personnel recovery law has far-reaching strategic implications. It embodies a mandate that the Secretary of Defense develop a comprehensive policy for personnel recovery. This will ensure the long term presence of a single high level position of authority for personnel recovery policy, to which subordinate Defense components must be responsive.⁸⁹ It requires the Secretary of Defense to assign functional responsibility and accountability for this task, which will serve as a "lightning rod" for Congressional concerns on personnel recovery issues.⁹⁰ All told, this new language has the effect of locking into law the recent policy initiatives of the Secretary of Defense. This should ensure a lasting personnel recovery capability.

However, with the personnel recovery system still in its embryo stage, it remains to be seen whether actual implementation will bring success. Personnel recovery is a broad-based system, the functions for which are scattered throughout the entire Department of Defense and beyond. By consolidating personnel recovery

under any single office, such as the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, care must be taken not to isolate the system from the functional areas on which it is based. For example, within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, key elements of personnel recovery policy are conducted by the offices of the Under Secretaries for Personnel and Readiness, Acquisition and Technology, Command, Control, Communication, and Intelligence, and General Counsel. If the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs assumes personnel recovery responsibility, it would be nearly impossible to take on all the personnel recovery-related actions of these other offices. Therefore, the role of the new Office of Missing Personnel must be to "integrate" and not to "consolidate" the personnel recovery policy function.⁹¹

The proposal to assign personnel recovery to the Defense POW/MIA Office poses specific challenges in this regard, since these two activities operate in entirely separate spheres. The POW/MIA office establishes policy and oversees field activities to locate and identify missing or detained persons already categorized as POWs or MIAs. This after-the-fact event is heavily based on intelligence and diplomatic functions, the staff being drawn largely from the Defense Intelligence Agency.⁹² Personnel recovery, on the other hand, is preventative and operational in focus—developing, training, and employing mainly military forces to prevent people from becoming POWs and MIAs. If the Defense POW/MIA Office becomes the Office of Missing Personnel and takes on personnel recovery, it must create an operational policy focus which it presently does not have. This will require close and continuous interaction with the other functional areas mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

Another major concern is that existing staffs are not adequate in size to implement the personnel recovery system and that, unlike joint combat rescue, there is no executive agent or joint field agency assigned to do this. Only one person in ASD (SO/LIC) and two persons working part time on the Joint staff are assigned to this task. With such little staff and no implementation agency, the task of promulgating policy and integrating the system across the entire Department of Defense will be daunting and slow. The Master Plan, which starts the process, is already a year behind schedule due to the impact of more pressing issues on limited Joint Staff manpower. At first glance, the assignment of personnel recovery to the Defense POW/MIA Office, with a staff of 122, suggests an obvious solution. But most of these positions support the intelligence and investigative field activities which implement the POW/MIA charter. Clearly, the new Office of Missing Personnel expertise must be expanded to meet its new operational mandate.⁹³

An efficient solution to these problems would be to expand the executive agent charter of the Joint Services SERE Agency to that of a Personnel Recovery Joint Field Agency. Accountable to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this agency could do the footwork to implement and maintain the personnel recovery system across the Services, theaters, and Defense agencies. The Joint Service SERE Agency already does this work as the joint executive agent for evasion and escape, code of conduct and POW/MIA policy. This proposal merely expands its scope to include the remaining areas of personnel recovery. Air Combat Command could continue to serve as the joint Executive Agent for combat rescue which is a large issue in and of itself, but it would be responsive to the new Personnel Recovery Joint Field Agency.

The Joint Staff would oversee both of these agencies, which implement the policies of the new Office of Missing Personnel. Assigning the Joint Services SERE Agency as a joint field agency provides personnel recovery with a ready-made policy implementation tool, complete with field expertise and Defense-wide connectivity.

Also critical to the success of the personnel recovery system is the need to expand personnel recovery beyond the Department of Defense into the interagency process and National Security Council. As we have seen in the cases of Hall and Durrant, the operative recovery method was diplomatic, not military, and this trend is likely to increase considering our current strategic environment. No formal mechanism exists to expand the personnel recovery system into these non-Defense agencies. Even considering the new Department of Defense-Central Intelligence Agency memorandum of agreement, interagency coordination remains largely ad hoc, voluntary, and personality-driven. Also, there is no formal mechanism to rapidly elevate time sensitive personnel recovery issues to the National Security Council. Instead, each agency must raise its concerns independently through its principal member. Not only does this stove-pipe arrangement slow time-critical decisions, but it denies the interagency principals and National Security Council rapid and comprehensive crisis situation assessments and policy recommendations.⁹⁴

One way “to rapidly bring needed information and expertise to bear on policy problems,”⁹⁵ would be to create a standing working group for personnel recovery under the the National Security Council. This forum, at the Assistant Secretary level, would ensure interagency coordination, oversee policy formulation and crisis management, and provide advice and recommendations to assist the lead agency

during an incident. Meeting on a regular basis, it would build the interagency network for information sharing.⁹⁶ But, just as it took direction from the Secretary of Defense to correct the problems of personnel recovery within his department, it will take direction from the Chief Executive, in the form of an executive order, to focus the other agencies on the personnel recovery requirement.

VII. Conclusion.

Congress and the Department of Defense now recognize the compelling and continuing need for personnel recovery today, greater in intensity and broader in scope than combat rescue previously was in peacetime. They have, for the first time in its 50 year history, taken affirmative action to provide for a comprehensive and lasting personnel recovery capability. This has been prompted by changes in our national security environment, which now stresses that we maintain combat readiness and contingency operations at a high level in peacetime, often needed in our new role as world peacekeeper.

The effectiveness of this capability now depends upon how well the Secretary of Defense defines and implements this system and in how well the Services and Defense agencies respond in providing real capability to the theater commanders. In an even larger sense, the success of the system will depend upon the ability of the Executive Branch to harness the potential of agencies beyond the Department of Defense to produce a truly national personnel recovery system.

APPENDIX A

Current Combat Rescue Capability by Service

The Army considers combat rescue to be a secondary mission of all its aviation, medical evacuation, and water craft units. Ground units can also provide combat rescue when tasked.⁹⁷ The Army's approach is an extension of its historic emphasis on rapid battlefield casualty extraction. Army aviation has traditionally operated in close proximity to its ground forces and provided rescue assistance on call. However, deep battle air operations now pose new challenges for Army combat rescue.⁹⁸ Separated from the bulk of other Army aviation, deep battle helicopter formations must provide their own rescue needs by diverting their own mission aircraft. This produces only a marginal rescue capability. During Desert Storm the Army had expected the Air Force to conduct their long-range rescue requirement.⁹⁹

The Marines consider combat rescue to be "an implied task that should not detract from primary functions."¹⁰⁰ To this end, they have devised a self-supporting combat recovery tactic known as TRAP (tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel). Using heavy lift helicopters and specially trained infantry platoons, TRAP missions are designed to provide a hostile area extraction capability for large or small Marine units. This was also the method used to rescue Captain Scott O'Grady in Bosnia.¹⁰¹

The Navy's combat personnel recovery method, known as "Strike Rescue," is based on its HH-60H helicopters that are organic to the carrier air group. These aircraft conduct anti-submarine warfare and rescue for the carrier air group in peace or at war. The HH-60H's are night, all-weather, medium threat capable helicopters.

Although they are not equipped for mid-air refueling, their 250 nautical mile range is extended by rapidly refueling from almost any Naval ship. The Navy has a total of 42 HH-60Hs, which include two Naval Reserve combat rescue units (16 helicopters) that maintain an alert posture for ship deployment.¹⁰²

Traditionally, the Air Force has built dedicated combat rescue forces for long range recovery of downed aircrews during major conflicts. Presently the Service is building a combat rescue force of 85 MH-60Gs, 29 HC-130 tankers, and pararescue specialists located in twelve squadrons; six active duty, three Reserve and three National Guard.¹⁰³ The Air Force routinely provides combat air support to rescue efforts by other Services too. This includes: rescue escort, combat air patrol, close air support, and command and control. Of the 40 tactical aircraft directly involved in the rescue of Captain Scott O'Grady in Bosnia, 31 were Air Force, which were supporting the Marine TRAP operation.¹⁰⁴

Combat rescue is a collateral mission for U.S. Special Operations Command forces, which they conduct in support of operations across the entire spectrum of conflict. These forces use “low-level threat penetrating fixed and rotary wing aircraft, Army, Air Force and Navy special operations teams, and maritime surface and subsurface vehicles.”¹⁰⁵ Joint Air Force and Army special operations forces have been conducting combat rescue alert for combined force air operations over Iraq and Bosnia now since 1990 and 1992 respectively, as well as for periodic contingencies.

The Coast Guard remains the primary source for maritime search and rescue with a variety of ships, airplanes, and helicopters. Its can, however, provide combat rescue support in permissive threat environments.¹⁰⁶

APPENDIX B

Current Personnel Recovery Doctrine

A review of current policy and doctrine reveals considerable inadequacies in the area of personnel recovery. Joint Publication 1-02 defines combat rescue as a specific task performed by rescue forces “to effect the recovery of distressed personnel during wartime or contingency operations.”¹⁰⁷ But the Department of Defense Directive 5100.1, which specifies the assigned functions of the Services, does not address personnel recovery or even combat rescue.¹⁰⁸ The previous (1986) version of The United Action Armed Forces (Joint Publication 0-2), described combat rescue as a “...secondary or supporting operation...which may be adjunct to various other operations and for which no one service is assigned primary responsibility.”¹⁰⁹

Doctrinal guidance can be found in a more complete form insofar as joint combat rescue is concerned. The 1995 Doctrine For Joint Combat Search and Rescue (Joint Publication 3-50.2), has superseded the combat rescue doctrine contained in the 1986 United Action Armed Forces, although it remains basically unchanged: “Each Service and [Special Operations Command] is responsible for performing combat rescue in support of [its] own operations, consistent with [its] assigned functions. In so doing, each Service...should take into account the availability and capability of the [other’s combat rescue-capable] forces, including the Coast Guard.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, “Joint force commanders have primary authority and responsibility for combat rescue in support of U.S. forces within their areas of responsibility [and] joint operations areas.”¹¹¹ The relatively new doctrine on Joint

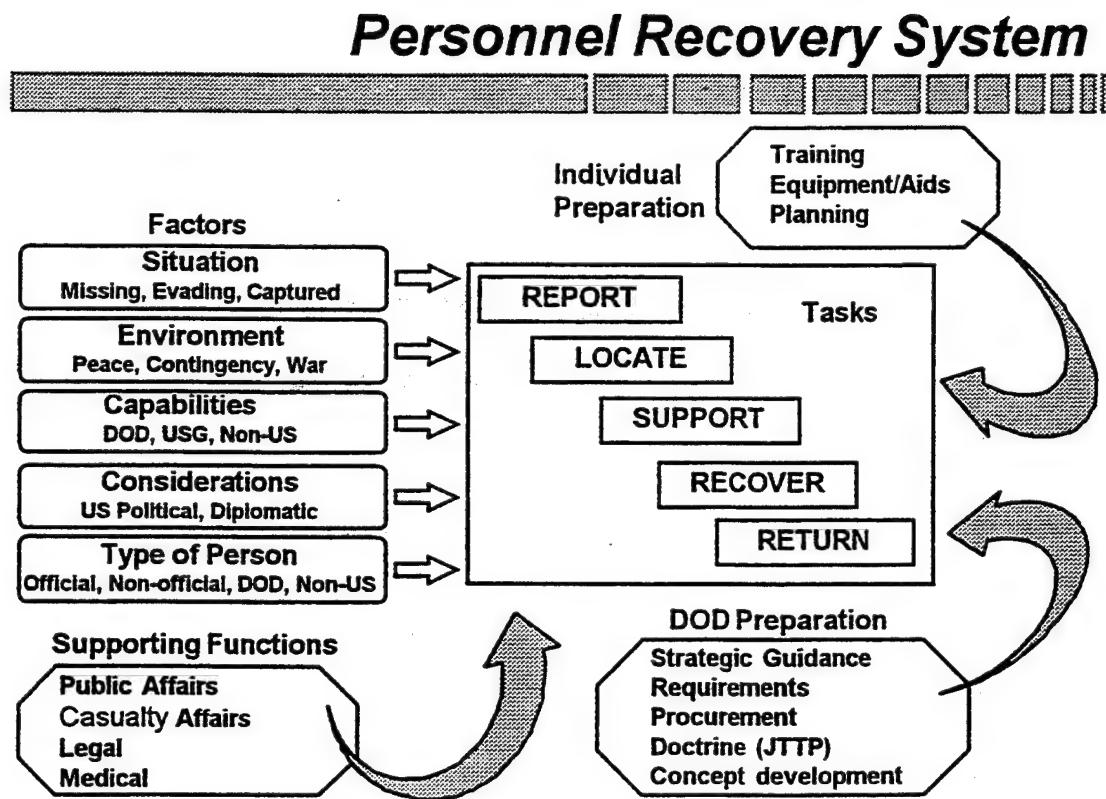
Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Combat Rescue (Joint Publication 3-50.21), incorporates important lessons learned from Desert Storm.¹¹²

Only two other functional aspects of personnel recovery are addressed by current joint doctrine: the two volume National Search and Rescue Plan (Joint Publication 3-50 and 3-50.1)¹¹³, and the Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Escape and Recovery (Joint Publication 3-50.3).¹¹⁴ There remains no other joint doctrinal guidance for individual aspects of personnel recovery or for the overall personnel recovery system itself. Consequently, the Joint Staff is now realigning the Joint Publication 3-50 series to eliminate these shortfalls. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

Regarding Service doctrine, it is clear that personnel recovery is not yet well understood or articulated. In the August 1995 first draft version of the Air Force's new Basic Doctrine Manual (Air Force Doctrine Document-1), combat search and rescue is addressed only as an element of the sustainment role, along with logistics and civil engineering. In this doctrinal context there is no Air Force reference to joint combat rescue, which was central to all Desert Storm combat rescue operations. There is also no reference to combat rescue or personnel recovery in the description of Military Operations Other Than War, although "recovery operations" is listed as one of the six types of Military Operations Other Than War.¹¹⁵ The omission of personnel recovery and the incomplete and inaccurate treatment of combat rescue are indicative of the challenges that the Secretary of Defense faces in implementing the personnel recovery system.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1



Source: "Joint Staff Analysis of Personnel Recovery Requirements, Policy and Capabilities." U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff briefing. December, 1995.

Figure 2

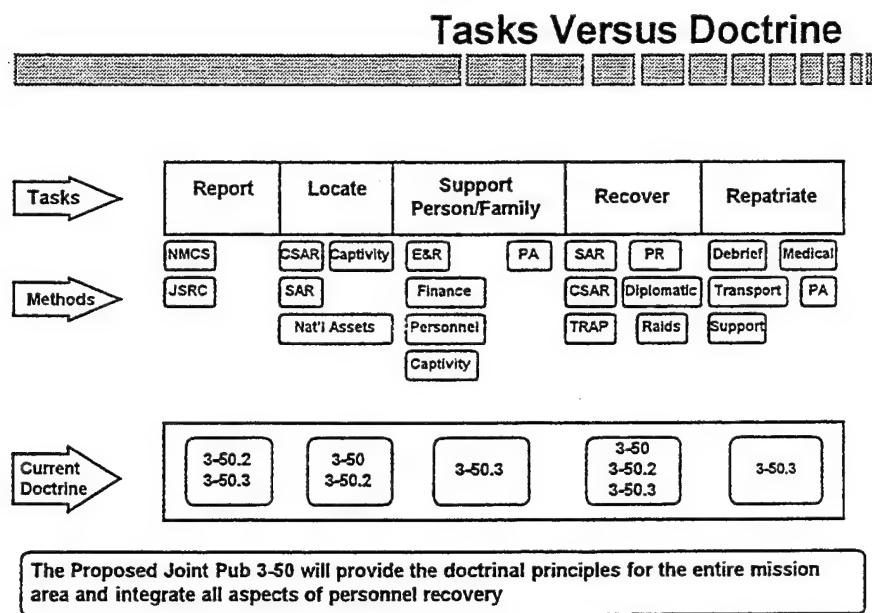
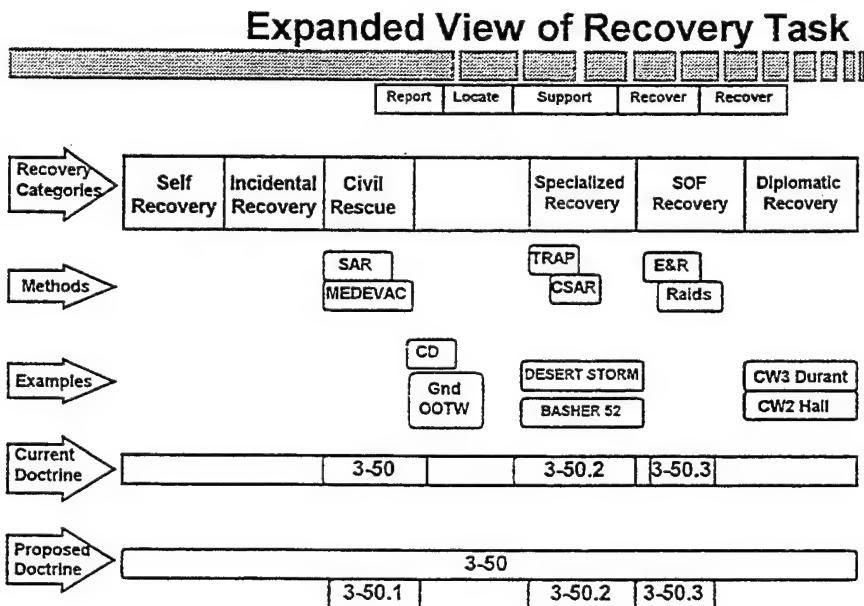


Figure 3



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